

Canine Bulletin

Nebraska Task Force - 1

August 2002

A Tale of Two Andys

Submitted by Andrew Pitcher

Elaine asked me to write about my recent experience at the Springfield pre-test.

Andy (dog) came from Golden Retriever Rescue in Nebraska, a non-profit organization which finds homes for needy Goldens. The first time I heard about Andy was when a friend called me about her new foster dog... "his name is Andy, and he's really good looking." "Well of course," I thought. "But he has really bad separation anxiety and has already destroyed his previous foster home's Koi pond and sofa," I was told. I wasn't sure how a dog could eat up a Koi pond, but I knew this would be a challenging dog. Unfortunately for Andy, things got much worse. He didn't like being crated and destroyed several crates designed to keep him and his new household safe. He would start drooling so badly when left alone he would be totally covered in saliva when his foster Mom returned. He would whine uncontrollably. One of the incidents involved him (almost) getting out of a metal crate, breaking teeth, getting his hind leg caught in the crate and dragging it around the house in the process destroying tables, chairs, and ripping up his leg. Anti-anxiety drugs didn't seem to help. After this went on for several weeks, euthanasia seemed the only option. I had looked after Andy a few times and he had been relatively good, so I thought there would be nothing to lose by attempting to foster him and see if he could be well enough to be adopted by someone (else). It also helped not having any material possessions of any value that he could destroy!

So, Andy came to my house. He was trained as much by my other dogs as me. They would not tolerate him going on destructive frenzies. A crate now seemed a safe option to him. I was emotionally ambivalent. My leaving and returning was not a big deal. There would be no anxious good-byes or joyous returns. Eventually he could be left on his own for extended periods without a crate. It was now time for him to find a home. Soon a



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Lead Canine Handler Change

Submitted by John Huff

After much thoughtful consideration Elaine Sawtell has determined that she will step down as the lead canine handler for NE-TF1. Elaine has served in this capacity since the inception of the task force.

Monica Barger has agreed to accept the responsibilities, as a result of Elaine's decision. Monica has worked closely with Elaine and NE-TF1 program management. It is the opinion of the program management that Monica is qualified for this position and we look forward to her strong leadership in this capacity.

Elaine will continue as a canine search specialist with the task force. She has done an outstanding job for the team, and has had a significant impact on the FEMA program nationwide during her tenure, including the creation of many of the processes used for canine certification. 🐾

Donations

Pfizer Animal Health has made a donation of \$75 to the NE-TF1 canine unit. It is in gratitude of Monica Barger's donation of time and talents to the Kansas State University Veterinary Medicine College's open house in April. 🐾

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visit to a family with another rescued Golden in Omaha was arranged. Everything seemed to look good. He got on well with the family and their dog. After looking after him for a couple of months, it was hard saying goodbye. The goodbye proved only temporary. The resident dog decided Andy was okay to visit, but didn't like him living there. After a couple of dog fights, it was decided to find a different home for him, so Andy came back to me. When other homes were discussed, I eventually had to say "I think I'll keep him."

I had taken Andy to some dog obedience classes for socialization. He had been at a meeting when Monica Barger and Zima were talking about search and rescue. He barked excitedly when Zima was playing with a toy. He was young, agile, and putting all four paws forward to do something. Could he do disaster search work?

About the same time, I had been working with my Labrador Retriever, Shoney, on disaster search and rescue. She had failed the basic test, but had been doing well, despite limited movement in her hind legs due to OCD in her hocks. I had also tried Waldo (my other Golden) but when he was unable to get up the ladder one day, I had him x-rayed and it was found that Hip Dysplasia made him unsuitable to continue with disaster search. So, it occurred to me to try Andy at disaster search. Despite many set backs, he worked well and we both learned a lot along the way. He is now a deployable search dog with the task force and I am very proud of him.

Now a bit about the pre-test...My feeling during the test were a mix of anxiety, fatigue, joy, frustration, disappointment, and relief. So I guess it simulated a disaster search deployment very well.

We knew it was going to be hot so we met at the Springfield rubble at 6:30 a.m. and started the test by 7:00 a.m. I had driven down the afternoon before so we could rest before the test. In any dog event, you learn never to take anything for granted. Sometimes the things you think are easy become a problem. I knew that Andy was pretty solid on most of the elements of the test, but when you start putting it all together and adding all the baggage of a test, well...

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NE-TF1 K9 Team Recognized

Recently the Lincoln Fire & Rescue Department was notified that we had received the iDickin Medal for animal gallantry from the PDSA.

The award states:

The Search and Rescue teams at Ground Zero and the Pentagon

For tireless courage in the service of humanity during the search and rescue operations at Ground Zero and the Pentagon following the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001.

In the face of physical danger each dog and handler combated choking smoke, negotiated shifting debris and fought extreme exhaustion to find life amidst the rubble. Working in unison, man and dog returned time after time to the scene of the tragedy, searching in hope and beyond the call of duty.

To the dogs and their handlers who came from all over the United States of America, drawn by a common cause and determination to offer their specialist skills to the search and rescue operations. Faithful to words of command and undaunted by the task, the dogs' work and unstinting devotion to duty stand as a testament to those lost or injured.



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Anyway, he did the obedience just fine. Although he has done AKC obedience and has his Companion Dog title, this is different from AKC competition obedience. Walking off-leash through a crowd can be a big challenge to a very social and people motivated Golden Retriever, especially when their favorite search victims are in the crowd. This part of the test is important since a disaster search area may have crowds of people around that the dog must ignore while he is working.

Thanks to a lot of early work, building this element, the bark barrel has never been a problem for Andy. Still, those 30 seconds seem to take forever. It is always tough to see a dog not getting a reward from a victim after such a good alert, but I made sure he got lots of praise from me. This is a good test of victim loyalty and the focus of the dog.


Despite Andy having his AKC Agility title, search agility has been a problem for him (and me). The FEMA test, although timed, is not a test of speed over standardized obstacles, but rather a test of the dog's confidence, natural agility and control over unfamiliar obstacles. It only takes an unpleasant accident to hurt the dog's confidence. We had been working on rebuilding confidence and control. Andy did well this time going over unstable and slick surfaces without a problem. He hesitated on the board of big spools, but fortunately this was not a required obstacle. I was very relieved when we completed the agility.

Directability had been a problem (since the pallet on a sawhorse incident), with Andy needing to rebuild confidence on being sent out to unfamiliar obstacles. Fortunately, the work we had done on his control proved valuable here and I was able to stop and redirect when necessary. I can see how important directions can be in a real disaster scenario when you need complete control of your dog in an unfamiliar environment.

Finally came the rubble search, everything is ok so far. It was getting hot, so I made sure I had plenty of water for the dog. For those who haven't seen it, the Springfield rubble pile is an interesting rubble pile. It is comprised mainly of quarried rock, rather than traditional slab rubble. The pile has recently been remodeled with a very large array of wooden pallets. These are to help simulate an unfamiliar disaster site, such as a tornado hit. Andy found his first victim quickly (several times), but had trouble negotiating the wooden pallets to search for the second victim. I didn't help since I didn't think there would be anyone under the pallets and didn't specifically direct him to search this area until the end. He looked interested and proceeded to climb the pallets, but unfortunately time had run out.

I have done enough dog training to know that when something doesn't work out the way you wanted, you have to go back, work out what the problem was then re-build the desired behavior, by gradually adding parameters until the dog understands the problem in any context. So, we will go back to work on confidence and search work on unstable pallets and other surfaces until he is completely comfortable with this as a search environment.

Elaine told me that, although he didn't pass the pre-test, he had performed well enough to be considered a deployable dog. I know that Elaine would never allow an unsuitable dog to be deployed, so I believe that he really is a search and rescue dog.

Of course, this would not have been possible without a viable and talented support team. Thanks to everyone who helped. Finally, special thanks to Laura and Eileen who helped as victims in Lincoln for many years, and to Shoney who was never a deployable dog, but helped me learn a lot about search and rescue training. 

Thank You

I deeply appreciate all your cards, e-mails, phone calls, prayers, and the generous donation to Word of Truth in memory of Bob.

Thank you,
Elaine Sawtell



Bob, Elaine, and Ditto in Colorado in 1993

New York's Furriest Dies at 10

Submitted by Juan Gonzales, NY-TF1

I just wanted to pass on the news that our Canine Handler, Robert Schnelle's dog, Zeus, died on Wednesday, August 24, 2002. Robert Schnelle and Zeus have been on the NY-TF1 FEMA team from its onset, and have been deployed to many disasters, such as the Oklahoma City bombing, the 1993 WTC bombing, and various hurricanes. 🐾

How Do I Submit Items for the Canine Bulletin

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